

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 27, 2003

Dear Colleague,

On the first day of this Congressional Session, we introduced legislation to re-institute a mandatory draft. Both of us believe that, as Americans, we all share the many benefits of living in this country. But if we are preparing for war against an enemy who wishes to "threaten our society," as the President says, then it makes sense that all who benefit from our society must share in the burden of defending it.

The two of us have many differences – both in terms of our respective personal backgrounds and how we view the potential need for military action in Iraq. Rep. Rangel voted against the House resolution authorizing the President to take action in Iraq. Senator Hollings voted for a similar Senate resolution. Nonetheless, we are in complete agreement on one critical point: if military action is considered necessary, then the burden of carrying out that action must not be limited to any one segment of the population.

Our proposal ensures that all Americans answer the call of duty and that the size of our military force meets our growing military needs. Some critics who have not read the bill assume that those of privilege will be able to get out of service with college deferments or some other appeal. In fact, the only deferment would be for the purposes of finishing High School and that would not extend beyond the age of twenty. The only exemption from service would be for those who have a physical or mental disability which prevents them from serving. All others – male or female, rich or poor, from the cities, suburbs or rural areas – must serve.

We both believe that President Kennedy's appeal to every American – "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" – is equally applicable to current generations of Americans. Our recent history has clearly demonstrated that when America is truly threatened, it must call on the strength of its people – all its people – and America's citizen soldiers will answer the call and serve well.

As Senator Hollings has pointed out repeatedly, our active duty forces have already experienced a high operations tempo since the beginning of our air war in Kosovo and throughout the war on terrorism. Now that we are potentially entering a new level of military needs, we can not assume that the all-volunteer force will suffice simply because the U.S. has not required large numbers of troops for its defense over the last twenty years.

America's military personnel needs were small between 1920 and 1940 but nobody had illusions that our manpower needs would not greatly increase as we faced new military challenges in the 1940s and 1950s. The Bush Administration continues to talk about daunting new challenges facing us now, but then presumes that the same force levels can meet those challenges.


Both of us are extraordinarily concerned that our military's current capacity would not allow it to fight multiple wars at once. We remain unconvinced by the Department of Defense's claims that the current all-volunteer military can meet any contingency that might arise. We are currently engaged in 14 peacekeeping missions around the globe. With prospects of continued military action in Afghanistan, a potential war in Iraq, the continued war on terrorism and growing tensions in the Korean peninsula, it becomes clear that we do not have the personnel to fight a multi-theater war.

The American military needs require us to call again on citizen soldiers. There has already been an increased number of deployments of the nation's National Guard and Reserve forces as well as the increased number of operational rotations for our active forces. In the event of a prolonged engagement in Iraq or elsewhere, we will have to call up more of our National Guard and Reserve forces, and they are already needed for the war on terrorism and in our numerous peacekeeping operations. Relying on a significant percentage of those forces on a regular basis is not a viable solution.

We applaud the men and women who are currently serving in active duty, in the guard or reserve. As we face new challenges, the U.S. must call on many others to make the same sacrifice, so that our force level is not stretched too thin. We believe that the men and women brought into the service under our legislation would be well trained and would serve just as patriotically as our brave men and women currently in uniform. As veterans, as policymakers and as citizens, we believe strongly that we must all shoulder the burden of defending our nation.

We hope you will join our efforts as a co-sponsor of either H.R. 163 or S. 89. Alternatively, if you do not feel comfortable co-sponsoring the legislation at this time, we hope you will at least join us in encouraging an open debate on the issue.

Sincerely,


Charles B. Rangel
U.S. House of Representatives


Ernest F. Hollings
U.S. Senate